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## Endogenous and exogenous factors in national development: inferences from the metaphor of witchcraft (Àjé) in Ọlátúbòsún Ọládàpò's poetry.

### Endogenous and exogenous factors in national development: inferences from the metaphor of witchcraft (Àjé) in Ọlátúbòsún Ọládàpò's poetry.

This work engages political commentary in the work of Ọlátúbòsún Ọládàpò, a Yorùbá poet. Its focus is on the way that political ideas and values that are rooted in Nigerian culture can inspire development. The study is an exegesis of a poem entitled *Emi lo ó maa fàjé rẹ sẹ?* ("What will you do with your own witchcraft?"). The reading explores the multilayered paradoxes and metaphors of witchcraft in the poem, concluding that the God-given abilities and capabilities possessed by Nigerians should be the bases for solving their national problems as the nation needs leaders of a vision and mission. The poet maintains that the Nigerian political leaders have a critical role to play in changing the fortune of the nation by leading by example. In addition, the poet opines that the single factor that explains the national economic stagnation is the lack of integrity and public spiritedness among the political leaders, illustrated through his metaphor of witchcraft. **Key words:** Metaphor; Ọlátúbòsún Ọládàpò (b. 1943); Yorùbá poetry; Yorùbá witchcraft (Àjé).

**Ọlátúbòsún Ọládàpò**

Olatunde Olatunji (1982: 19) was the first to note Ọládàpò's inventiveness, saying "Ọlátúbòsún Ọládàpò [...] is [...] innovative in that he can work within the tradition of Yorùbá poetry without being blindly imitative." Born in September 1943, Ọlátúbòsún Ọládàpò, also known as *Odíderé Ayékòdótó* (after the loquacious parrot), is a folk poet who writes and chants on record plates in Yorùbá to his audience, who are mainly the people of South-western Nigeria. He was educated in Ibadan (St. Luke's College) and Lagos before working as a reporter with *Daily Sketch* and *Gbohunbohun*, and as a producer in Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service (WNBS). His potential for chanting Yorùbá poems became a public show in 1965, during an interhouse festival of arts at St. Luke's College when he was asked to chant *Ìjálá*. People from diverse radio stations saw his performance where he was adjudged the winner at the competition. They were highly impressed. The media people who came that day encouraged him and that enhanced his interest in the Yorùbá indigenous language. He completed the Teacher's Training Programme in 1967 and was posted to St. Davids

School, Kudeti, Ibadan, as a class teacher. While teaching he was still going to the WNTS to chant *Ìjálá* on the radio. He was eventually employed in 1970 at the then WNBS/WNTV to anchor Yorùbá programmes on Radio and Television and to translate and read the Yoruba news. He resigned from the WNBC/WNTV in 1977 to establish Olatunbosun Records Company. By 2010 he had produced about 42 albums for himself and had also produced well over 200 other indigenous artistes spread across Yorùbá land. He is the author of such collections of poetry as *Àròyé Akéwì* (I and II) (1973, 1975) and *Àròfẹ̀ Àwọn Qmọ́dé* (1975).

### Introduction

Literary works invariably respond to the political occurrences of their age. The increasing interest of African language literatures in politics testifies to a growing desire on the part of cultural producers in Africa in general to respond meaningfully to the challenges of development. The recourse to the political may also be an attempt on the part of writers and artists to promote their perception of political power and influence. This is consistent with Karin Barber's position that popular culture be read not simply for its sociological and historic detail, but that they should be investigated as "expressive acts" (1987: 2). The issues of responsibility and political dedication in literature, which were of direct political significance during the 1960s in Nigeria, also carried within them the seed of theoretical linguistic and literary expression as depicted by particular authors. And as Wellek and Warren (1949: 112) say, "the value for the exegesis of a poetic text of knowledge of the history of philosophy and of general thought can scarcely be overrated." *Ọládàpọ̀* engages with the political history of twentieth century Nigeria in *Emi lo máa fàjẹ ẹ rẹ sẹ?* The views and opinions of the writer apparently colour the poem in the figurative language of a political type, while the personages and events in it are of a radical type.

The *Àjẹ* phenomenon is multi-dimensional and the *Àjẹ* discourse has attracted the attention of many scholars (for further discussion see Omosade 1979; Hallen and Olubi 1997; Washington 2005). *Àjẹ* is synonymous with *Ẹlẹyẹ* (the owner of birds) in Yorùbá cosmology and there are various birds associated with this cosmological force. These include *kannakánná*, *òwìwì* (owls), and any other bird with strange tendencies. In *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts*, Teresa Washington (2005: 14) argues that:

Women of *Àjẹ* have many significant attributes and roles in society. They are bestowed with spiritual vision, divine authority, power of the word, and *àsẹ*, the power to bring desires and ideas into being [...] Most important, *Àwọn Ìyá Wa* are teachers whose gifts, lessons, trials and punishments compel their communities to seek higher levels of spiritual evolution and redirect misguided destiny, direction and power.

In order to illuminate its workings, the witch-hunt must be examined in the context of culture change theory in line with the revitalization theory of Wallace (1956, 1970), in which a model of culture change is attractive because it analyzes cultural as well as individual levels, while also dealing with social conflict. Wallace (1956: 265) considers two types of culture change: classical models of gradual change via chain reaction (known collectively as *moving equilibrium processes*), and *revitalization*, an abrupt change owing to “a deliberate, organized conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture”. Schoeneman, (1975: 530) while referring to Wallace (1956: 266–67; 1970: 15–20), maintains that:

There must be intercommunication and cooperation within and among the levels of a cultural organism in order to preserve its integrity and to combat stressful threats to its existence. This is accomplished through the *mazeway*: a mental image of self, environment, and culture, of their dynamics and interrelationships, and of ways to manipulate them to attain goals and avoid pitfalls. A *mazeway* is maintained by all members of the culture and is necessary for stress reduction on all levels of the system.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 235): “Metaphor is not merely a matter of language. It is a matter of conceptual structure. And conceptual structure is not merely a matter of the intellect – it involves all the natural dimensions of our experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape, texture, sound, etc.” Ọládàpò’s rhetorical deployment of *Àjẹ* as a metaphor in his poem shows the centrality of this force to Yorùbá ethos of the postcolonial milieu, although he maintains the popular notion about *Àjẹ* in Yorùbá cosmology. To the Yorùbá, *Àjẹ* manifests both negative and positive traits, depending on the situation. Therefore, Ọládàpò sees the need for Nigerians to appropriate the positive traits of the popular *Àjẹ* in order to create an ideal society. To him, *Àjẹ* constitutes an unconquerable force or power, one that transcends human knowledge and ability. It also connotes special natural ability that can be used either to develop or stagnate society. More important is the fact that Ọlátúbòsún metaphorically conceives of this force as representing political will in diverse forms that leaders can deploy for the progress of society. This is in line with the thinking of Lévi-Strauss (1963: 201–03) who maintains that metaphor “can change the world”. He opens this poem with the assertion that everybody and everything in the universe is endowed with the *Àjẹ* force. In other words, every entity manifests the ability and potential to bear positive fruits and also influence others in the community:

Nightingales are possessed by rhetorical power  
Spiders are possessed by the power to spin wool  
Woodpeckers are possessed by the power to peck wood  
Wisdom is the witchcraft of Ifá<sup>1</sup>  
Counsel is the witchcraft of Ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀<sup>2</sup>

The various creatures mentioned above represent various countries of the world that are deploying their resources for the progress of their people. Ọládàpọ blurs the distinction between fact and fiction as he seeks to disclose and also challenge the hegemony of institutionalized discursive practices of the political elite. The progress of an overlying political ideology seems to take up most of the narrative. The path to the main political ideology he is canvassing emerges from his rhetorical question, “what will you do with your witchcraft?”

Now, Ọlátúbòsún  
The-one-who talks-like-a-parrot  
If you incidentally receive the calabash of witchcraft  
After you have received the power of witchcraft  
10 What will you do with your witchcraft?  
Let us discuss an important matter  
Let us abandon the joke and humour<sup>3</sup>

He returns to the same style of metonymy by referring to various creatures and the innate abilities that they draw on to vitalise their existence in depicting countries of the world that are progressive. The “wisdom” he refers to in the excerpt below hints at the potential, wisdom, knowledge and influences possessed by these creatures that typify developed countries:

Termites are wise  
They use their wisdom to build their house  
Snakes are wise for using their wisdom to harm human beings  
Bees are also wise  
Bees are using their wisdom to gather honey<sup>4</sup>

and

Witchcraft is the knowledge of human beings  
20 As long as it is used appropriately  
There is none without the power of witchcraft  
The way each person uses his/her witchcraft is different.<sup>5</sup>

Ọlátúbòsún’s metaphorical turn of mind can be very challenging and his metaphors are at once apt and very unconventional. For instance, his Àjẹ is not typical. Rather he presents him or her as a citizen on the verge of becoming a mystic by being initiated as an Àjẹ. And the trope of mysticism enables him to fall back on Yorùbá cosmology and to convey his message across to his audience with the obliqueness of the initiated. This confirms the observation of Welles and Warren (1949: 94) that:

The poet himself is a member of society, possessed of a specific social status: he receives some degree of social recognition and reward; he addresses an audience,

however hypothetical. Indeed, literature has usually arisen in close connexion with particular social institutions; and in primitive society we may even be unable to distinguish poetry from ritual, magic, work, or play.

Through this dominant inferential system of sending across his message, he maintains that each Nigerian has something to contribute to the development of the nation and that it will be wrong to look elsewhere for solutions to the challenges of the nation. He takes the commitment of the Western world to making life better through their inventions as a challenge to the rest of the world and suggests that everyone is capable of deploying their God-given abilities in the direction they choose. The invention of aircraft and electricity is among those cited as remarkable events that have impacted positively on humanity:

There is somebody over there who received his calabash of witchcraft  
and invented electricity –  
the-one-that-is-turned-on-and-off-with-finger-nails  
Another person received his witchcraft  
He invented a mysterious car  
which makes people dive in the sky like a hawk  
Certain people received witchcraft's calabash  
and used it to kill other people's children  
30 Their witchcraft is to suck blood  
It is used to kill their own children  
There are still people that received the calabash of witch  
They are using it to raise children successfully<sup>6</sup>

Ọládàpò has identified the inability to use their accumulated capital for positive developmental purposes as a serious problem of the Nigerian bourgeoisie. This is consistent with what Fanon (1967: 141) says about the bourgeoisie:

A bourgeoisie similar to that which developed in Europe is able to elaborate an ideology and at the same time strengthen its own power. Such a bourgeoisie, dynamic, educated and secular, has fully succeeded in its undertaking of the accumulation of capital and has given to the nation a minimum of prosperity. In underdeveloped countries, we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or of inventiveness.

Poetry, like its kindred art form, music, is not just socially structured; its activity comprises the important public domain in which a worldview is made patent in a multilayered and powerful form (Turino 1989: 29).

In a bid to stress the primary concern of the poem, the poet restates the main rhetorical question; acknowledging a few political figures who employed their political powers or witchcraft (*Àjé*) to improve the lot of their people:

Now, *Olátúbòsún*  
The-one-who talks-like-a-parrot  
If you receive the calabash of witchcraft  
What will you do with it?  
Let us discuss an important matter  
Let us abandon the joke and the humour  
40 *Olátúbòsún* has paid homage to *Èsù*  
and *Sàngó* before he left home  
I pay homage to all sages  
I pay homage to all *Èlẹyẹ* of the whole world  
And all technocrats who are endowed with wisdom  
And they are using their wisdom for the benefit of the people.<sup>7</sup>

He decries the negative use of political powers (*oselu Àjé*) and pronounces judgment on those who use their powers to harm others and the society at large (lines 46–60), maintaining that such undesirable elements are not only harming the society but also mortgaging the future of their own children. There are basically two types of authoritarian regimes – the development-oriented political elite or benevolent autocrats, and the kleptocrats. The former – the ideal type of autocrats – will seek to maximise society’s wealth and catalyse development, while the latter type of autocrats will be concerned only with their own riches (and be development-oriented only to the extent that it serves their own interests) (Coolidge and Rose-Ackerman 2000: 58–59). The poet sees an equivalent of this idea in the Yorùbá belief in the existence of bad and good witches. The assumption is that the bad ones end up wearing rags while the good ones excel in their chosen career and have positive influence on their communities and society at large:

I will not receive the calabash of a wretched witch  
The one who wears rags around the community  
I will not receive the calabash of a witch  
That makes use of the calabash of his children’s head (skull) to drink water  
50 I cannot become a fearful *Kannakánná* bird  
The bird that uses human blood for ritual at *Àwẹ*  
If a wizard kills his children  
He will not live in the world forever  
The witch that used the elders’ *àṣẹ* to kill a stranger  
Will sooner or later  
suffer the repercussions in the end

Any stream that carries a lump of wood in a bending position  
cannot flow easily  
The day that *sìgidi* swims in a river  
60 That day marks the end of its life  
After I have received the calabash of the witches of the world  
I have seen what I will use my witchcraft for  
The witch who will be nursing children, the witch who saves<sup>8</sup>

Again, he presents another character (*Ajésùnmbò*) who has a bad notion about her society. This character represents another category of politicians in the nation:

When I asked *Ajésùnmbò* what she would use her witchcraft for  
Listen to what she said  
Come and hear what the lover wants to be using her witchcraft for  
The witch who loses, the witch never wins a game  
We play *ayò* game weekly and she has never won  
70 We play *ayò* game weekly and she has never won.<sup>9</sup>

Poets are not merely reflections of a pre-existing sensibility analogically represented; they are positive agents in the creation and maintenance of such a sensibility (Geertz 1973: 451). Irvine and Sapir (1976: 81) also suggest that the relationship between artists and the social structure of a community is not just an abstract tautology but that their productions and the social structure are related to a set of interactional opportunities and expectations that underlie them. *Ọládàpò*'s interest in the oddities in his society operates within a growing concern with social challenges in African writing. Eustace Palmer has equally remarked that "novelists [indeed artists generally] are becoming less preoccupied with cultural and sociological matters and more concerned about exposing the corruption and incompetence which are so widespread in African political and government circles" (cited in Onoge 1983: 54). Canvassing for exogenous support as part of the solution to the national problems of Nigeria, *Ọládàpò* says:

It would be better for us to appeal to the elders  
Let all gamblers donate money  
Let us use a lot of money to appease the witches  
After you have donated the money  
Bring all the money to me  
After I have become an omniscient witch  
I will fly away to the western world  
I love to be playing a draw game with the westerners<sup>10</sup>

From the above, the poet regards all corrupt and incompetent politicians as gamblers and wasters. Therefore, he appeals that instead of wasting the national resources on projects that they cannot effectively execute they should seek foreign intervention (lines 76–78). It is the belief of this poet that his audience will pick up the main messages in the poem because it discusses topical issues that they are familiar with. As Leach (1976: 41) argues, “the participants in a ritual share communicative experiences through many different sensory channels simultaneously [...] when we take part in such a ritual we pick up all these messages at the same time and condense them into a single experience”. Furthermore as Hope (2000: 19) notes widespread corruption remains the bane of failed states, and so emblematic of the failure of ethical leadership, democracy and good governance.

Thus *Ọládàpọ̀* presents a character that is corrupt (*Àtándá Amúlúúúdùn*, lines 74–87), who typifies the corrupt Nigerian leadership so as to satirise official corruption. The poet specifically refers to the embezzlement of the nation’s oil wealth, the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The fact that what should have been used for the benefit all Nigerians has been illegally appropriated by political leaders and kept in foreign banks is a proof that Nigerian leaders have demonstrated exceptional capacity for impoverishing their people by embezzling what should have been used for the common good. The arrest and trial of many Nigerian politicians for money-laundering and related offences in recent times confirm this:

What about *Àtándá Amúlúúúdùn* the one who was extorting before he died  
Listen to what he said, come and hear what he said  
I heard a rumour  
That the oil money, and money from peoples’ sweat  
That all poor people (masses) are dying for  
Many important dignitaries of this country  
Are keeping big amount of money in banks abroad  
Money is breathing in Switzerland  
Money is breathing in Geneva<sup>11</sup>

The author understands that while the local political elite contributes to the social and political problems of developing nations, there are other forces, such as imperialism and the international economic order, which play a major role in destabilising developing countries politically and economically (see Ngara 1990: 66). Many western countries facilitate the corrupt practices of African leaders.

Another solution to the Nigerian problem contained in *Ọládàpọ̀*’s poetry dating back to 1975 – when this poem was published – is the idea of a Sovereign National Conference which will offer Nigerians an opportunity to discuss the future of their country. This is implied in the first two lines (89–90) below. What *Ọládàpọ̀* canvassed was only realised in 2005 when the Nigerian President at the time, Chief Olusegun



Obasanjo, opened a national conference to discuss constitutional reforms. Topics such as changing electoral rules, increasing women's representation in government, redefining citizenship within states, and equitable allocation of oil wealth, were among issues discussed (Menezes 2005). *Ọládàpọ̀* makes a case for the primacy of locally-sourced factors in solving the country's problems by appealing to political leaders to borrow from the examples of many developed countries of the world:

It is necessary for us to meet,  
It is necessary for us to rob minds together as witches  
It is necessary for us to concertedly sacrifice to the witches  
So that all witches in this land  
Will begin to fly abroad  
So that they can bring back our money  
That was looted by sneaky money launderers  
Money realised from locust beans, money from pepper  
Money that was collected from extortion  
Money that was collected illegally<sup>12</sup>

To fully decode the context of the poet's referent in the last five lines in the above excerpt, one needs to understand that the poem was published in 1975, fifteen years after Nigeria's independence. This excerpt decries money-laundering by various political leaders of Nigeria even at the time. His presentation of this social vice shows that, "the past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Hall 1994: 395). The only thing is that, "treasures of the past are most valuable when they are pawned for more pressing needs of the present" (Chow 1993: 147). The point being made here is that the poet as a social commentator and a critic of socio-political misdemeanours uses his experiences of the past and his foresight to warn leaders at all levels to put an end to all practices that are inimical to national progress and development. Okogbule (2007: 156) identifies money laundering as a serious problem of the political oligarchy, saying: "One of the most pervasive economic crimes in Nigeria today is Money Laundering. Although relatively unknown in the country until the late 1980s, it is now a veritable companion of the corruption virus which has permeated every segment of the Nigerian society." In addressing the looting of the nation's resources, *Ọládàpọ̀* delves into Nigerian history:

Many past politicians  
They had buried our money and can no longer dig them out  
May be the person who had looted the money is dead  
And it may be that they are not free  
That is why people have built houses on the buried money<sup>13</sup>

Ọládàpọ's contention is that individual citizens should make it an obligation to use their talents, influences and power to develop the country. His argument is that only a patriotic citizenry can guarantee the growth of Nigeria. He equally suggests that the people should use their associations with the outside world to restore the lost glory and honour of the land:

All the poor people's monies that have been buried  
I want to go and retrieve them all  
After I have received the calabash of the witches  
Bring out all our monies that you have looted  
That is what I will use my witchcraft for  
*Àtàndá Aláyà, Afipónjúkóléonilé*  
Your witchcraft will go a long way in solving the problems.<sup>14</sup>

Ọládàpọ's vision in this poem is mainly humanistic and political in disposition. He tries to build morality into the texture of his poem.

The writer maintains that the natural resources that Nigeria is endowed with are being mismanaged. And he uses another fictional character (*Adéòtí*) to depict the mind of people in the Nigerian nation towards national development:

When I asked Adéòtí  
Come and hear what he wants to use his witchcraft for  
Nigeria is a land flowing with oil and riches  
Although it is flowing with milk and fertilizers  
All commodities are scarce as gold  
It is better for us to appease the elders  
Let us appeal to the witches of the whole world  
On the day when the crude oil we have has become very expensive  
So that they can have an ocean of crude oil  
So that they can become invisible smugglers  
So that we can import goods  
So that the masses will live in abundance<sup>15</sup>

The poet maintains that one of the qualities that can help in the development of Nigeria is the individual's assumption of a positive mindset towards national development. He therefore resorts to canvassing "invisible smuggling" as seen in the last three lines (121–23) above as a metaphor for tapping wisdom from the developed countries of the world. I find this portion of Ọládàpọ's poem particularly relevant in confronting the political and historical realities that provided the impetus for the writing of the poem. The sense of aloofness and defiance with which the characters such as *Ajèsùnmbò*, *Àtàndá Amúlùúdùn*, *Àtàndá Aláyà* and *Adéòtí* responded to the questions by an omnipresent questioner (the poet) is a metaphorical reflection of

many political leaders', and even other Nigerians' indifference to the problems of society clearly mentioned in the poem. The poet proves that there is little or no sense of accountability on the part of Nigerian political leaders.

Using another character, a sage who is also a retired civil servant, the poet presents the agony of a dedicated civil servant who never made enough money in his career. One of the expectations of *Ọládàpò* as a poet and a social critic with regard to the Nigerian polity and governance is seen from the response of this sage to his question in the following lines of the poem:

- A servant somewhere  
who served the government until his old age  
And was unable to build his personal house was another person that I asked  
I asked, Elder statesman  
After you have received the calabash of the witches that I am talking about  
What will you do with your witchcraft?
- 130 Let us abandon the joke and humour  
He replied that the witches kill small children and adults  
I also heard that  
The witches can pervert peoples' destinies  
Ram's intestine can get to lizard's stomach in the night  
If I become a witch that has the power of transformation [*àṣẹ àyídá*]  
I want to turn all poor people in this land [nation]  
To become rich people  
And I want to turn all rich people  
To become poor
- 140 I will make all big bosses  
To become servants again  
So that all messengers  
Will hold political power  
May be if the bosses wear shoes with thorns  
They will know where thorns are entering poor people's feet<sup>16</sup>

From the above, the poet used his sage character that has the understanding of various areas where witchcraft could be used to propound an ideal government for Nigeria. The ideal government he is canvassing is a government that promotes egalitarianism. It is possible to infer from the attributes of this character that political leaders should aim at serving the masses without giving any thought to self-enrichment, and what has come to be known as "the national cake" should be equally distributed to develop the nation at large. The poet maintains that political leaders should aim at raising the standard of living of the masses (lines 135–45), and that they should not close their ears to the suffering of the masses.

The poet's understanding of problems associated with inaccurate census figures is also highlighted in his poetry. He believes that the inability to have a successful census will hinder planning for development:

The annulled census  
The disrupted census of the past  
Do not mince words for the masses any longer  
Stop deceiving the masses  
150 If my mothers [*l'ya mi*] turn into birds in the midnight<sup>17</sup>  
They will tell us the number of people existing without a single mistake  
Stop wasting our money on census  
Let us give our money to the witches  
Let them execute the census for us<sup>18</sup>

Censuses are vital to national development given that citizens use public services at various times such as schools, health services, roads and libraries, etc. These services need to be planned, and in such a way that they keep pace with the changing patterns of modern life. Yet it is impossible to plan services for 'invisible' people. Hence, accurate information is needed on the number of people, where they live and what their needs are to enhance effective planning. The writer is conversant with Nigerian history. The first attempt at a nationwide census was between 1952–53 and it has usually been considered an undercount for a number of reasons: apprehension that the census was related to tax collection; logistics difficulties in reaching many remote areas; and inadequate training of enumerators. There was another census in mid-1962 and it was eventually cancelled after much controversy and allegations of overcounting. This was followed by another attempt in 1963, which was officially accepted, although also encumbered with charges of inaccuracy and manipulation for regional and local political purposes. After the civil war that lasted between 1967 and 1970, an attempt was made to hold a census in 1973, but the results were cancelled due to the controversy that surrounded it (Chapin Metz 1991). The poet's reference to *l'ya mi*, the witch, in the above excerpt (lines 150–54) is a metaphor for those who are skilful, truthful, patriotic and non-partisan enough who will carry out a reliable census. The witches in Yorùbá cosmology are believed to be possessed with the power of second sight, which enables them to know everything. The poet incorporates this trait to depict expertise as one of the qualities needed for national development. In this light, the poet's expectation is expressed thus:

After I have received the power of witches  
I will use my power  
To sanitize the nation<sup>19</sup>

This poet presents his political ideology of sanitising the nation. Sanitising in this manner connotes wiping off the enemies of progress in the nation by unseating them. This kind of truth is hard and difficult for some people to express but the poet's patriotism and personal courage enable him to advance his political opinion. This is in line with the view of Denys (1978: 206) that the writer should not take a particular stand but that if he does, the quality and nature of his commitment matter so far as he imaginatively interprets the existing crisis, as a servant of the society to dispense the truth. The naïve expressions of a deteriorating political history and national development provide a thematic background for the purposes and motivations of Qládàpò's poem, especially where he says:

Let us abandon the joke and humour  
Why?

- 160 We made fire our husband  
We got burnt  
We made rain our mistress  
We caught cold  
We then made harmattan our confidant  
It bends us like roasted *akika*  
Craze for money has turned the world into a paradox  
There is nobody to decode its paradox  
There are certain elders  
When they want to collect the calabash of the witches  
They will not punish those that embezzled public funds
- 170 There are deceitful people in the land  
They did not suck those people's blood  
There are past disgruntled politicians  
And they were spared  
After they had received witchcraft  
They use it to kill their blood children  
It is better if we receive the witchcraft of convenience  
That we can use to organise this land [nation] from the top  
Without mincing words  
This issue should be of concern to everybody
- 180 You have seen what every individual wants to use his or her witchcraft for  
And you know the issue of witchcraft I have been discussing with you  
My dear friend, if you receive the calabash of elderly witches  
After you have become *Ẹleye*, and you have become owner of the world  
What will you do with your witchcraft?  
This matter concerns the initiates  
It also concerns non-initiates<sup>20</sup>

In expressing the feelings of the masses about the political instability arising from bad governance in Nigeria, the poet draws attention to various vices that pervade the society: killings, assaults and cheating among others. These are all expressions of disappointment about the past regimes, especially military regimes. The poet exploits the past to form part of the discourse of resistance in the present to effect a change. "The past is merged with the present in such a way as to keep us firmly focussed on the present as history." (Green 1997: 24). The poet articulates the outlook of the masses on the political leaders and their many disappointments. This is a way of creating the impression that an urgent change is needed. Nigeria gained independence on 1 October 1960 and, "the social and economic problems and the political cross-currents that arose from mass-unemployment of the youths were far-reaching as they became ready tools in the hands of politicians and thus became pawns in the game of chess of the volatile political situation" (Adesina and Olorunfemi 1998: 133–34). Between 1966 and 1979 the nation witnessed persistent civil unrest, economic crisis and political misconduct with the military regime. Describing this, Adesina and Olorunfemi (1998: 135) say:

Following accusation of maladministration and mismanagement, the first military government of General Yakubu Gowon was toppled on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1975. A new military administration headed by Muritala Mohammed and later on (from February 1976) by Olusegun Obasanjo stepped into the saddle of power. The new regime sought to correct the ills bedevilling the society.

The poet finally reiterated his position that all and sundry in Nigeria have to meaningfully contribute to desirable changes that will move the nation forward through their influences and power (*Àjé*). In essence, he clamours for true democracy where there will be rule of law, separation of powers, cooperation, oneness and patriotism.

### Conclusion

The foregoing will suggest that a poet is not only influenced by his society; he also influences it. Ọládàpọ's poem, *Emi lo máa fàjé è rẹ sẹ*, is politically and philosophically informed. The poem draws heavily on the nature of Nigerian politics. In other words, the content shows the author's attempt to expound his idea of responsible governance. While specific historical events play a role in the development of the poem, they seem less important to him than the human elements of political inundation. A sense of history allows Ọládàpọ further room to manoeuvre within the world of his fictionalized characters in projecting his political ideas. Certain political and developmental principles can be conveyed and social reform accomplished by invoking what has been called the "moral imagination". This is when authors, by use of their works in any form, tap into the moral imagination of their readers. They are not only addressing their readers' intellect, but their emotions as well. The poet makes

a case for cultural resources for political transformation and resistance to injustice and inequalities through thoughtful and critical citizenship. He dialectically maintains that Nigerians need more of endogenous than exogenous initiatives in developing the nation. The metaphorical representation of traditional values (*Àjé*) and social perception in his poetry helps to reveal a profound political, social and economic transformation needed for national development in Nigeria.

#### Notes

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